

# DRAMA





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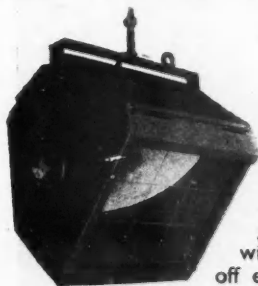
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HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER, D.LITT., LL.D., F.R.S.L.

1877-1946



# DRAMA

## *The Quarterly Theatre Review*

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NEW SERIES

WINTER 1946

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THE death of Harley Granville-Barker closes a career unique in the history of the English theatre. Elsewhere in this number Mr. Bernard Shaw contributes a vivid picture of that career's first period, and throws much light on the enigma of its sudden break at the end of the first world war. The truth may well be that whatever the proximate cause, Granville-Barker was fated to a transformation. His abandonment of work on the stage in favour of a life devoted to scholarship and the furtherance of drama as a civilising force could not have been the result of anything but a fundamental urge which demanded, and so luckily found, under the inspiration of his second wife, ultimate fulfilment.

On his return from America in 1919 he became the first Chairman of the Council of the British Drama League, an act symbolic of the reorientation of his mind and outlook. His book "The Exemplary Theatre," published in 1924, provided as it were a philosophic background to the energies of the League itself. From the beginning, his personality dominated the Council, but in no oppressive or dictatorial manner. In every respect he was the perfect Chairman, showing time and again a political sense in no way inferior to his artistic; and suggesting that had his interest lain that way, he might well have figured prominently on the parliamentary plane.

A word must be said, even in so short a note, of Granville-Barker's charm. Actors who worked with him in the few productions with which he was associated between 1919 and 1939 ("The Blue Bird," a revival of his own "Madras House," and "King Lear" at the Old Vic) were perhaps a little startled by an eye for detail unusual in the easy-going days of the thirties. But they soon found themselves at his feet. Those who had served him in earlier years never forgot their lost leader, and knew that without him their acting life could never be quite the same. And so it was with everyone who came within the sphere of his influence. They will always remember the exquisite form, and the eyes which could change so swiftly from the humorous to the quizzical, from the friendly to the stern. He inspired respect and affection wherever he went. A man of exalted spirit, and of no common clay.

## PLAYS IN PERFORMANCE

by Philip Hope-Wallace

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IN the old days one could have almost told the time of year from the quality of the "first night." Nowadays the seasons are all over the place, the hot weather comes in January and it is quite likely that the best play of the year, after wandering round the country for months on end, will arrive in the capital in the middle of the holiday month. At the time of writing, however, there is a tolerably well defined sense of a Season in full swing, and though the scene is still cluttered up with pieces which can only politely be described as having lost their first freshness, there is no mistaking the vigour and vitality of many new offerings, and the promise of good things on the way.

But with the return of the Old Vic Company to the New Theatre (hardly big enough for the audience struggling for seats) one may rule a line, and say a new season has begun. Certainly this repertory company takes pride of place. Mr. Laurence Olivier's *King Lear*, generally received with great admiration, was a most interesting performance and among the most intelligent that this gifted and versatile actor has given us. The special character which marked it out from the Lears of certain other actors was its great initial simplicity. This was above all a most human and endearing Lear (which has much to commend it as an interpretation, even if it affects the motion of the play adversely). Instead of starting on the customary high note, Mr. Olivier began quietly, indeed almost whimsically, and in the opinion of some critics did not begin to touch any kind of grandeur until the point of Lear's decline. The scene of recognition by blind Gloucester (well played by George Relph) was done with rare beauty and thenceforward the central performance grew steadily in size and power. Instead of Lear falling away into a whimper as so often happens, Mr. Olivier was able to make him appear at his greatest where he kneels to Cordelia (Joyce Redman). The whole production was also Mr. Olivier's work—perhaps too large a combined responsibility. It was curiously uneven, and offered some strange castings—other than what is dictated by repertory conditions. The Edmund was seriously overtaxed; on the other hand the Goneril and the Regan were made far more striking and elaborate figures than is usual. Perhaps the most beautiful performance was Alec Guinness's Fool, both subtle and sympathetic; but the charge brought against the production as a whole—that in spite of its realism it was curiously disjointed and ill-related—had some substance. Impetus was lacking. The use of picturesque scenery and a great deal of music was not a help in this matter, but was partially successful in some other ways. Like the central performance the production abounded in highly imaginative strokes.

Priestley's play *An Inspector Calls*, originally produced in Moscow was

the company's second offering and brought back Mr. Ralph Richardson in a rather one-track part. This typical and ingenious play, clever but decidedly mechanical in its effect, has a strongly put and sane message (roughly "we are all members one of another") and illustrates its theme by showing a well-to-do bourgeois family (date about 1912) being brought to the knowledge that each of them has in some way contributed to the despair and death of a fellow human being. What the inspector called to say was that a girl has committed suicide. As in *Dangerous Corner*, unpleasant secrets come to light and after a succession of excellently contrived "revelation-scenes," much recrimination and some changes of heart, the lesson is firmly rammed home—only to be somewhat weakened by the family's sudden realisation, when the inspector has left, that he was not a policeman at all! What was he then?—a celestial visitor, the voice of conscience? Moreover, the family begin to realise that the victim was probably not the same girl in each case. Complacency begins to resettle, only to be rudely shattered by a splendid final *coup de theatre*. This saved the last act, but the piece seemed overlong for its material and curiously lacking in human sympathy; it had the inhumanity of a tract. But it played like clock-work and the Old Vic's performance was in every respect excellent.

At the Lyric, Hammersmith, where the Company of Four has been having a rather up and down season, a play and a performance aroused much interest; this was a version by Ronald Duncan of Cocteau's *Azraël*, titled *The Eagle has Two Heads*, which gave Eileen Herlie a long and grandiose part as the doomed and beautiful queen in a quasi-Ruritanian *drame d'amour*; a part she played with most notable vigour and address. The play, turning upon Cocteau's favourite theme of the oneness of love and death, is poetic in content but (in translation at all events) was almost fatally fustian in manner. Its lengthy analysis of sentiments is carried on in tremendous flights of rhetoric and near-bombast which put English actors to some pains. In spite of Miss Herlie's valiant efforts the drama did not quite soar as it presumably should have done.

At the St. James', John Clements and Kay Hammond made a brave effort to resurrect Dryden's charming *Marriage a la Mode*, an untheatrical affair. The settings were charming and with a little more of the true high comedy style, the piece might have been more than the pretty memory it is at this moment. The theatre is at present filled by Lonsdale's new comedy, which made a curiously old fashioned effect. A typical Lonsdale piece (scandal in high life, worldly aphorisms, slightly risky sex warfare, etc.) seemed to have collided with a conventional little blackmail drama. The one cancelled out the other. When the police plot was over, we had not become interested enough in the marital comedy to want to follow it on. It was an evening of much good incidental entertainment, but made no total effect as a play. Yvonne Owens and Michael Gough made their mark beside such accomplished things as another "old buffer" by A. E. Matthews.

Another play which held attention excitedly while it was in progress, but is remembered as something rather laboriously contrived, was *Message for Margaret*, written for Flora Robson, by John Parrish. This was the old Wife (or rather widow) versus Mistress battle. Miss Robson, splendidly opposed by Barbara Couper, was called upon to depict a woman whose husband is killed, whose husband's mistress is about to have a baby, and who is driven nearly to murder by grief and jealousy—all which she does with the greatest loyalty and effect. The scene is Bloomsbury and the talk has a highbrow colour, but for all that, the drama ends on the simplest sentimental note, with Miss Robson adopting the illegitimate baby. It says much for the play's theatrical vitality and the force of the playing that all this was accepted without smiles.

Other vehicles for players of personality have offered less theatrical interest, but Barabara Mullen, as a match making fisherman's wife in *Mother of Men*, was able to give charm and plausibility to a rather oversimplified if pleasantly sentimental piece. In *The Poltergeist*, by Frank Harvey, a promising and potentially exciting psychic subject was too early allowed to collapse into farce, but offered some truly hilarious moments with Gordon Harker fronting the supernatural with cockney phlegm.

*Fools Rush In* was a louder and jollier version of one of those prenuptial family upsets of which *Quiet Wedding* was a subtler example. *Pick-up Girl*, a salutary American sermon on juvenile delinquency by Elsa Shelly, graduated from the Lindsey Theatre club to the West End—deservedly. Its setting is a children's court examining the case of a schoolgirl debauched in her own home. The moral is pointed quietly and effectively and what the play lacks in theatrical distinction it makes up with sincerity. An attempt to revive Somerset Maugham's *Our Betters*, with the fashions of twenties, was not an unqualified success, rather because of the diffidence of the playing than because the brilliant piece had lost its sting. Cecil Beaton's period sets and costumes added a relish of malicious amusement—nothing is so droll as fashions twenty years outmoded—but did not help to bring out the cardinal point of the play. *Soldier's Wife*, by the author of *Claudia*, Rose Franken, was a maladroit attempt to reset an essentially American comedy in England. Better American plays played frankly in English than reset in English so that they lose all plausibility.

With Tyrone Guthrie's handsome and turbulent revival of *Cyrano de Bergerac* the Old Vic repertory is complete. Rostand's verbal fireworks became damp squibs in this new prosaic version by Brian Hooker—as perhaps they must in any translation—and the acting collectively sadly lacks flash and spirit, though all the parts are diminished as would be those of opera-characters deprived of their music. The play though still making some of its effect seems an odd choice for this company, especially as Ralph Richardson, though bringing to the famous part all his charm and skill, cannot persuade us that he has the natural endowment for it.

# GRANVILLE-BARKER

## *Some Particulars by Shaw*

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IN the year 1904, when I was 48 years old, I was an unacted playwright in London, though certain big box office successes abroad, notably those of Agnes Sorma as *Candida* in Germany and Richard Mansfield in New York as *The Devil's Disciple*, had proved that my plays were both actable, and possibly highly lucrative. But the commercial theatres in London (and there were no others) would have nothing to do with them, regarding them as untheatrical and financially impossible. There were no murders, no adulteries, no sexual intrigues in them. The heroines were not like heroines; they were like women. Although the rule of the stage was that any speech longer than twenty words was too long, and that politics and religion must never be mentioned and their places taken by romance and fictitious police and divorce cases, my characters had to declaim long speeches on religion and politics in the Shakespearean or "ham" technique.

Besides, I could not offer my plays to the established managers because I was a noted professional critic, and, as such, would have been understood as inviting bribery.

I had, therefore, not only to publish my plays, but to make plays readable. A leading friendly publisher whom I approached had published the plays of a fashionable playwright, and had shewn me the ledger account of the transaction, recording absolutely no sales except in the little batches indicating amateur performances for which copies of the play had to be bought for rehearsal.

I substituted readable descriptions for technical stage directions, and shewed how to make the volumes as attractive in appearance as novels. A young publisher, Grant Richards, rose to the occasion with pioneer pluck. His venture succeeded; and plays broke into the publishing market as Literature. And I, though unacted, made my mark as a playwright. My plays formed a unique reserve stock available for any management with sufficient flair to try the experiment of a Shavian theatre.

Meanwhile, in looking about for an actor suitable for the part of the poet in *Candida* at a Stage Society performance, I had found my man in a very remarkable person named Harley Granville Barker. He was at that time 23 years of age, and had been on the stage since he was 14. He had a strong strain of Italian blood in him, and looked as if he had stepped out of a picture by Benozzo Gozzoli. He had a wide literary culture and a fastidiously delicate taste in every branch of art. He could write in a difficult and too precious but exquisitely fine style. He was self-willed, restlessly industrious, sober and

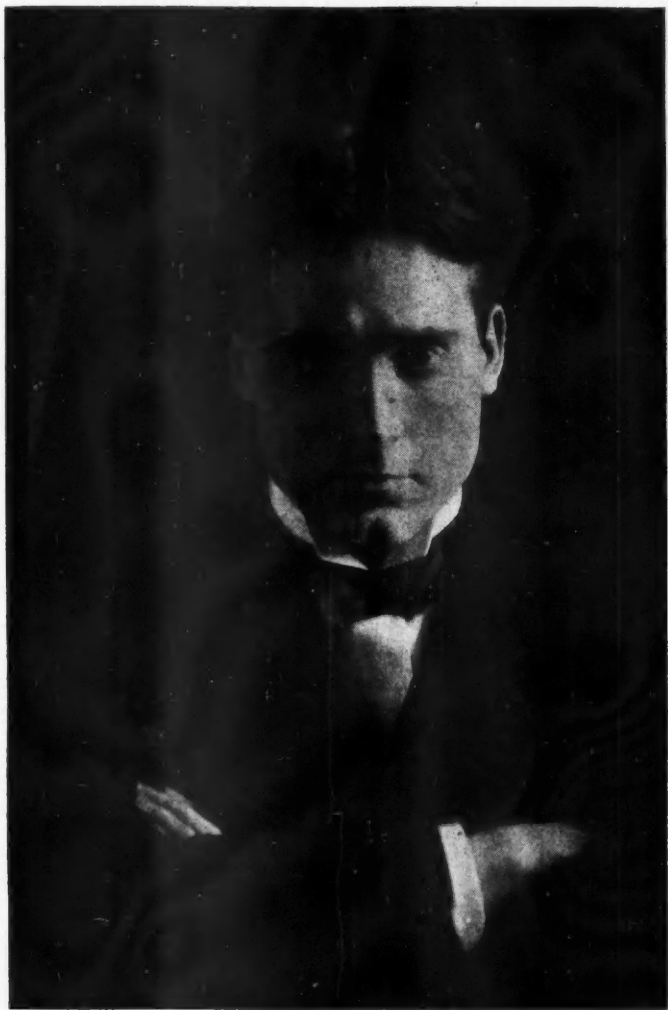
quite sane. He had Shakespear and Dickens at his finger ends. Altogether the most distinguished and incomparably the most cultivated person whom circumstances had driven into the theatre at that time.

I saw him play in Hauptmann's *Friedensfest* and immediately jumped at him for the poet in *Candida*. His performance of this part—a very difficult one to cast—was, humanly speaking, perfect.

Presently a gentleman with a fancy for playing Shakespearean parts, and money enough to gratify it without much regard to public support, took the Court Theatre in Sloane Square, made famous by the acting of John Hare, Clayton, Cecil, Ellen Terry and by the early comedy-farces of Pinero. He installed therein as his business manager the late J. E. Vedrenne, who, when his principal was not indulging in Shakespearean matinées, kept the theatre going by letting it by night to amateurs. Granville Barker was engaged for one of these revivals in the ordinary course of his professional routine. I have said that he was a self-willed Italianate young man with qualifications far beyond those which the theatre could ordinarily attract. I need not describe the steps by which the Court Theatre presently became virtually his theatre, with Vedrenne in the manager's office. They began with matinées of *Candida*, the expenses of which were guaranteed by a few friends; but the guarantee was not needed: the matinées paid their way. More matinées of my plays followed with Barker as the leading actor; and before long Vedrenne and Barker were in a position to take the theatre over from the Shakespearean enthusiast as a full blown management; and I ceased to write plays for anybody who asked me, and became playwright in ordinary to this new enterprise.

But it is not enough to have a fascinating actor for your heroes: you must also have an interesting actress for your heroine. She dropped from heaven on us in the person of Lillah McCarthy, who, having learnt her business in the course of a tour round the world as the beautiful Mercia in *The Sign of the Cross* after playing Lady Macbeth at the age of sixteen like an immature Mrs. Siddons, burst in on me and demanded a Siddonian part. After one glance at her I handed her *Man and Superman*, and told her she was to create Ann Whitefield in it.

We were now complete, The Court experiment went through with flying colors. Barker, aiming at a National Repertory Theatre, with a change of program every night, was determined to test our enterprise to destruction as motor tyres are tested, to find out its utmost possibilities. I was equally reckless. Vedrenne, made prudent by a wife and family, was like a man trying



GRANVILLE-BARKER

*At Pickards Cottage, 1901,  
from a photograph by Bernard Shaw*



to ride two runaway horses simultaneously. Barker worked furiously : he had not only to act, but to produce all the plays except mine, and to find and inspire all the artists whom he drew into the theatre to carry out his idea. In the end he had to give up acting and devote himself entirely to producing, or, under all the pressure I could put on him, to writing plays. The Court was abandoned for larger and more central theatres, not always one at a time. The pace grew hotter and hotter ; the prestige was immense ; but the receipts barely kept us going and left no reserves with which to nurse new authors into new reputations.

At last we were in debt and had to put up the shutters. Having ruined Vedrenne in spite of his remonstrances we could not ask him to pay the debts ; and we were bound to clear him without a stain on his character. Barker paid all he possessed ; I paid the rest ; and so the firm went down with its colors flying, leaving us with a proved certainty that no National Theatre in London devoted to the art of the theatre at its best can bear the burden of London rents and London rates. Freed from them it might pay its way under a director content to work hard for a modest salary. For the evidence read the book Barker wrote in collaboration with William Archer.

The combination, Lillah-Barker-Shaw, still remained, and was reinforced by Shakespear. Barker reached the summit of his fame as a producer by restoring Shakespear to the London stage, where he lingered only in the infamous mutilations of his works by the actor-managers and refreshment bar renters.

But this was done at the cost of an extravagance which could not be sustained. Without Vedrenne to plead for economy Barker was reckless. Lord Howard de Walden came nobly to the rescue financially ; and Barker gave him full value artistically, but made ducks and drakes of his heavily taxed spare money.

Quite early in this history, however, Lillah and Barker got married. I knew that this was all wrong ; that there were no two people on earth less suited to one another ; that in the long run their escapade could not stay put. But there was nothing to be done but make the best of it. Certainly, for the moment, it worked very well, and had every air of being a brilliant success. She was an admirable hostess ; and her enjoyment of the open air and of travelling made her a most healthy companion for him. He, in spite of the vagabondage of his profession, was not in the least a Bohemian ; and the dignity of marriage was quite right for him and good for him. The admirations and adorations the pair excited in the cultured sections of London society could



GRANVILLE-BARKER AS LOUIS DUBEDAT IN  
"THE DOCTOR'S DILEMMA "

*From the painting by Maxwell Armfield, R.W.S.*

be indulged and gratified in country houses where interesting and brilliant young married couples were welcome. And professionally they were necessary to one another just as I was necessary to them. It actually made for the stability of the combination that they were never really in love with one another, though they had a very good time together. The appalling levity with which actors and actresses marry is a phenomenon much older than Hollywood; and I had no excuse for being surprised and every reason for finding the arrangement a convenient one. Still, I was instinctively dismayed.

My misgivings were finally justified by a domestic catastrophe. When we had tested the possibility of a highbrow repertory theatre in London to the insolvency and winding-up of the Vedrenne-Barker management, Barker, cleaned out financially, went to New York to consider an offer of the directorship of the new Millionaires Theatre there. Finding the building unsuitable he turned down the offer, and was presently overtaken by the 1914-18 Armageddon and came back to present himself to me in the guise of a cadet gunner, and later on (he being obviously wasted as a gunner), as an intelligence officer in a Sam Brown belt. He looked the part to perfection.

In New York, however, the Italian volcano in him had erupted unexpectedly and amazingly. He fell madly in love—really madly in the Italian manner—and my first effective intimation was a demand that I should, before the end of the week, procure him a divorce, or a promise of one, from Lillah.

Not yet realizing that I was dealing with a lunatic, I naturally thought that Lillah was prepared for this, and that they had talked it out and agreed to it before she left America. As I had never believed in the permanence of their marriage, and thought that a divorce would restore the order of nature in their case and be a very good thing for both of them, I approached Lillah to arrange the divorce. I was at once violently undeceived. Lillah was as proud as ten thousand empresses. The unprepared proposal for a divorce struck her simply as an insult: a monstrous, incredible, unbearable, unpardonable, vulgar insult: something that might happen to common women but could never happen to her. I had a difficult time of it; for I at once lost the confidence of both parties: of Lillah because instead of indignantly repudiating the proposed outrage and renouncing Barker as the infamous author of an unheard-of act of *lèse majesté*, I was acting as his go-between and treating the divorce as inevitable and desirable: of Barker, because my failure to obtain a decree nisi within twenty-four hours shewed that I was Lillah's accomplice in the worst of crimes, that of delaying his instant remarriage. There were no broken hearts in the business; for this wonderful pair, who had careered together so picturesquely, and made such excellent and quite kindly use of the

coincidence of their ages and gifts, had never really cared a rap for one another in the way of what Shakespear called the marriage of true minds; so that now, in the storm raised by the insensate impatience of the one and the outraged pride of the other, there was no element of remorse or tenderness, and no point of contact at which they could be brought to reason. They had literally nothing to say to each other; but they had a good deal to say to me, mostly to the effect that I was betraying them both.

And now it may be asked what business all this was of mine. Well, I had thrown them literally into one another's arms as John Tanner and Ann Whitefield; and I suppose it followed that I must extricate them. I succeeded at last; but I could have done it easily six months sooner if they had been able to escape for a moment from their condition of passionate unreasonableness; and I came out of the conflict much battered from both sides, Barker blaming me for the unnecessary delay, and Lillah for having extorted her consent by arguments that almost amounted to blackmail.

Happily the very unreality in their marriage that made the tempest over its dissolution so merciless also cleared the sky very suddenly and completely when it was over. The ending was quite happy. In a prophetic moment in the struggle I had told Lillah that I foresaw her, not as Barker's leading lady to all eternity, but as a handsome chatelaine with a title and a distinguished "honest to God" husband, welcoming a crowd of the best people on the terrace of a beautiful country house. She took this as being in the worst possible taste, her imagination being just then full of a tragic and slaughterous *Götterdämmerung* of some kind as the end of Lillah. But it is exactly what has happened to her. When these twain who worked with me in the gory of their youth settled down handsomely in the dignity of their maturity, I rejoiced in their happiness and leisure.

My part in the divorce had been complicated by the attitude of the lady who had enchanted Barker. This lady was not a private nobody. She was a personage of distinguished talent as a novelist and poetess. Unfortunately for me, she was an American, which meant then that the latest great authors for her were Henry James and Meredith: the final politicians Jefferson and Washington. Socialism was to her simple sedition, and Shaw a most undesirable acquaintance for her beloved. Nothing I could do could conciliate her or maintain our alliance. After their retirement to Devon and then to Paris he became a highly respectable professor. Besides his *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, he wrote two more plays, and collaborated with his wife in translations from the Spanish. Virtually we never met again. Our old sympathy remained unaltered and unalterable; but he never dared to shew it; and I could not intrude where I was not welcome. He had well earned a prosperous and happy retirement after his long service and leadership in the vanguard. I hope his widow has come to see that the wild oats he sowed with me have produced a better harvest

than she foresaw, and that his original contributions to our dramatic literature are treasures to be preserved, not compromising documents to be destroyed.

In what has been written lately, too much has been said of him as a producer, too little as an actor, and much too little as an author. Producing kills acting: an actor's part dies if he is watching the others critically. You cannot conduct an orchestra and play the drums at the same concert. As long as I was producing and Barker acting all was well: he acted beautifully; and I took care to make the most of him. But I kept pressing for the enlistment of other authors, and urging Barker to write, which he did slowly, repeatedly protesting that as it was not his profession, and was mine, it was easy for me and very hard for him. Galsworthy, Masfield, Laurence Housman, and St. John Hankin (for the moment forgotten or neglected, but a master of serious comedy) came into our repertory, financed at first by revivals of my potboiler, *You Never Can Tell*. Barker's production of his own plays and Galsworthy's were exquisite: their styles were perfectly sympathetic, whereas his style and taste were as different from mine as Debussy's from Verdi's. With Shakespear and with me he was not always at his happiest and best; but he was absolutely faithful to the play and would not cut a line to please himself; and the plays pulled him through with the bits that suited him enchanting and the scenery and dressing perfect.

He adopted my technique of production, but was utterly inconsiderate in its practice. I warned him again and again that the end of it would be a drastic Factory Act regulating the hours of rehearsals as strictly as the hours of weaving in a cotton mill. But he would not leave off until the unfortunate company had lost their last trains and buses and he had tired himself beyond human powers of maintaining the intense vigilance and freshness which first rate production, or indeed any production demands. I myself put a limit of such attention at three hours or less between breakfast and lunch, and absolutely refused to spend more time than that in the theatre.

His only other fault was to suppress his actors when they pulled out all their stops and declaimed as Shakespear should be declaimed. They either underacted, or were afraid to act at all lest they should be accused of ranting or being "hams." I once asked a violinist of great experience as an orchestral leader, William Reed (Elgar's Billy Reed), whether he agreed with Wagner that the first duty of a conductor is to give the right time to the band. "No," said he. "The first duty of a conductor is to let the band play." I still want the Factory Act, and hold with Billy that the perfect producer lets his actors act, and is their helper at need and not their dictator. The hint is meant specially for producers who have begun as actors. They are the first instead of the last to forget it.

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# THE THEATRE IN AMERICA

by Giles Playfair

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TO begin with what is good, the American theatre occupies a place of dignity and importance in the nation's life. Whether, having regard to the recent efforts of the Arts Council, the same can now be said for the English theatre, I am not in a position to surmise, but I do know that, if the Daily Press is genuinely reflective of public taste and interest, the answer must be no. Even before the days of paper rationing, the space allotted to theatre happenings in the majority of London newspapers, particularly those with the largest circulation, was grotesquely small and usually filled with the strictly picayune. Furthermore, the dramatic critics of these papers (from which I exclude specifically *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Sunday Times* and *Observer*) were notoriously subject to a variety of pressures liable to cripple their freedom of expression: such pressure as the blandishments of Press Agents, the whims of proprietors and the indirect blackmail exercised by advertisers.

All the New York newspapers, down to the "Tabloids," carry a daily theatre column devoted, not to vulgar gossip, but to straight news, and all employ a critic where integrity of opinion is above suspicion and who is permitted to write at sufficient length to make possible a fair and balanced judgment of play, performance and production. That abomination called the "Press Reception," inextricably a part of most West End first nights, at which critics are entertained to free drinks on the management during the intervals, is unknown on Broadway. Nor would any manager dare introduce it unless he were willing to court immediate ostracism by every New York newspaper without exception. Moreover, while certain London managers have, on occasion, successfully employed the threat of withdrawing their advertising to gag or secure the dismissal of a particular critic whose views they considered hostile, whenever a Broadway manager has attempted to emulate this example he has gone down to humiliating defeat. Because the American theatre occupies a place of dignity and importance in the nation's life, the Dramatic Critic, no matter what class of paper he represents, holds a secure and honourable position.

Conversely, one must conclude, therefore—if the Press is an accurate mirror of public opinion—that the theatre is taken more seriously in America than in England, yet whether the American theatre, in its present state, is in

fact worthier of esteem than its English counterpart is another matter entirely. I would say flatly that it is not.

In support of this contention, the visit of the Old Vic Company last May provides a rather striking illustration. There were, it is true, a few dissentient voices, but in general New York playgoers were told, and undoubtedly believed, that nothing in their own theatre could hold a candle to the Old Vic Company and that the opportunity to see some of its productions was by far the most exciting that had come their way in a long time.

Now without wishing to disparage the Old Vic Company or to underestimate the value of its work and the even greater value of its aspirations, I am not persuaded that the productions it presented in New York were notably of a higher quality than many of those on view at the Old Vic itself before the war. At that time the Old Vic was a theatre whose chief purpose was not to set new standards in production but rather to offer at cheap prices Shakespearean and other classical revivals performed as competently as possible within the limits of its somewhat restricted resources. One went there, it is true, to see an outstanding individual performance—Olivier's *Coriolanus*, for example, or Gielgud's *Hamlet*—but one did not go in any hope of finding the best of which the English theatre was capable in the way of serious dramatic presentation.

In New York, so it seemed to me, the Old Vic Company offered some individual acting of unusual excellence. And one could not imagine that, on a general level, any of its productions approached the realisation of Gordon Craig's theory or the emulation of Granville-Barker's practice; or, indeed, had not been compassed in fairly recent times. In that sense, therefore, the eulogies heaped on it by the majority of New York's critics and public alike were an indication of the artistic bankruptcy of their own theatre.

At the same time it should be said that if, as I understand, the Old Vic now aspires to represent in all its performances "not the school," as Edward Kean once remarked, "but the perfection of the art itself," if it aspires to become an experimental laboratory for charting the future as well as a peerless treasure house of the past, if, in brief, it aspires to transform itself into that truly National Theatre of which a few able and selfless visionaries have vainly dreamed for so long, then it already has two priceless advantages, for lack of which the art of the American theatre is being swiftly and inexorably corroded. These are, first, independence of purely box office considerations, and, second, a tradition, firmly established by its admirable leading members, for resisting the astronomic allurements offered by the vandals of Hollywood as the price of permanent captivity and stultification.

One could name from the current list of Broadway productions half a dozen that are skilled and polished, entertaining and worth seeing, but one could name none that provides evidence of genuine originality, progress,



boldness or even an indigenous quality that one might hope but would not be able to find elsewhere. There is nothing vital about the American theatre. To-day it is doing nothing that it has not already done as well and perhaps better before. It is static and even on the verge of retrogression.

It will inevitably deteriorate further unless it can solve its economic problem. This problem, as I have already indicated, is twofold.

In the first place, the rising costs of production have compelled even managements, where ambition transcends the desire to coin money, to adhere more and more closely to a deadening policy of "safety first." According to the most recent figures available, a one-set play cannot be produced on Broadway for less than between \$50,000 and \$60,000, that is to say upwards of £12,500. The significance of this amount may be better appreciated when it is recalled that before the war it was perfectly possible to produce a one-set play in London at a minimum cost of £1,500.

The "safety first" policy, while it does not automatically banish from the stage everything of artistic merit, does preclude productions which may be thought to have no guaranteed drawing power. In other words, it limits activity to such as has previously received, in some form or another, box office blessing, and closes the door to discovery and innovation. Thus it is reasonably "safe" to produce an experimental play by Thornton Wilder, but not at all safe to produce a play of similar quality by an unknown author. Or again, it is safe to stage a classical revival, provided the play, the leading players, and the producer are of proven popularity, but certainly not safe, to invite anyone, however adventurous and exciting his ideas may be, to undertake a production of, say, *Troilus and Cressida*, unless his work has long since received the stamp of overwhelming public approval.

In consequence, there is no genuinely pioneer Broadway management. The Theatre Guild, which once was conspicuously so, is now barely distinguishable by its work from an ordinary commercial play producing organisation. At the present time it is chiefly represented by two musical comedies—or "musicals," as they are more succinctly called in America. The first of these, *Oklahoma!* based on the folk play *Green Grow the Lilacs*, by Lynn Riggs, was produced as long ago as March, 1943, and must be accounted Broadway's biggest success of recent years. The second, *Carousel*, an adaptation of Molnar's fantasy, *Lilom*, was produced in April of last year and came as the inevitable follow-up to the first. Both, from the point of view of book (by Oscar Hammerstein II) as well as music (by Richard Rodgers), are indubitably far above the average run of musicals, but having said that one has said all. In the most charitable estimate possible neither has contributed anything to the art of the theatre, and while there are claims that *Oklahoma!* has revolutionised or at any rate advanced considerably the technique of musical comedy as such, I cannot for my part subscribe to them. *Oklahoma!* has a credible plot, it does



IVA WITHERS AND JOHN RAITT

*In "Carousel," presented by The Theatre Guild, New York.  
(photo: Vandamm Studio).*

without slapstick, it introduces its chorus as an authentic crowd and it employs ballet sequences which are not extraneous to its action but develop it. These, apart from the superior quality of the writing and music, are the features which distinguish it from the ordinary musical. With the single exception of the use of ballet to develop action—an idea originated, I fancy, by the Russians—they were all possessed by *Music in the Air*, a show which was likewise written by Oscar Hammerstein (but some fifteen years ago) and which, in my view at least, was a good deal more beguiling than *Oklahoma*!

Theatre Incorporated, a non-profit making organisation which was responsible for importing the Old Vic Company, was founded rather less than a year ago with the lofty intent of filling the place left vacant by the Theatre Guild. But up to now it, too, has played excessively "safe," and there are as yet no indications that it really plans to do anything else. It began its career with a highly successful revival of Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*. The leading lady was an English actress, Gertrude Lawrence, and the leading man the English-trained Canadian actor, Raymond Massey. The play was produced (or directed as they say in America) by the English producer Cedric Hardwick, and the costumes were designed by the English firm of Motley. There was, therefore, nothing remarkably American about it.

Now had it been other than the first presentation of a group allegedly devoted to promoting the art of the *American* theatre, one would make no complaint on that score. Clearly there should be room on Broadway for revivals of plays by Bernard Shaw and such revivals are likely to be more effective if they are largely the product of imported talent. At the same time, by no stretch of the imagination can an English-dominated revival of *Pygmalion* be regarded as representative of the American theatre or as an advancement of its art.

In a country that is justifiably proud both of its youth and its pioneer spirit and is as nationally-minded as any other in the world, one looks hopefully to the theatre for bold experimentation, for fresh and stimulating ideas in the fields of acting, playwriting and production, above all for something truly creative and excitingly indigenous. But, at the present time, one looks almost in vain. The blight of "safety first" is on Broadway—and beyond. I am told that in days gone by the summer stock theatre of the Eastern seaboard undertook experimental work, but a survey of the season just past reveals a woeful failure on the part of these theatres to live up to their pristine reputation, for, in several, their policy has been to stage a weekly popular revival (e.g., *Blithe Spirit*) with a film star especially flown from Hollywood to play the leading part.

Curiously enough, in my personal experience, which covers four seasons, the only Broadway management that has dared a real gamble in the cause of art is the arch-commercial firm of the Shubert brothers. In March, 1945, the Shuberts presented *Dark of the Moon*, a dramatisation of the Barbara Allen

hillbilly legend by two young graduates of Princeton University, where, I fancy, the work was originally produced. Dealing with a conflict between the natural and the supernatural, their play combined poetic imagery with stark native realism, and was not only a thing of beauty in itself but was essentially and inimitably American. I do not think it brought the Shuberts any financial reward nor was it even a particular *succes d'estime*, but I remember, after the first night, overhearing one worldly-wise critic observe to another that its hitherto unsung leading man, who, incidentally, though he had shown some quality had far from proved himself an accomplished actor, was "now a cinch to get a Hollywood contract."

From that remark may be deduced the second part of the economic problem which the American theatre must solve if it is to progress instead of retrogress.

At the moment, while Broadway may still be able to attract new talent, it cannot hold it—or at least not long enough to develop it and use it to its own lasting advantage. Hollywood is apparently too powerful a magnate, and mercilessly drags away any young actor or playwright who displays the merest promise of achievement. I could prove this point by specific examples, but it is, perhaps, sufficient to say that during the past decade the only personality of first magnitude who has arisen in the American theatre is Orson Welles, and he has permitted himself such a diffusion of interests that his influence is now negligible. For the rest, the outstanding actors, producers and playwrights devoted to the serious drama are as they were ten years ago, and have been joined by no others who have chosen to remain among them.

Besides draining the American theatre of its embryonic leading actors and dramatists, Hollywood adversely influences the type of show that is presented on Broadway. It is part of the "safety first" policy for managers to consider the "picture angle" before making any commitment, and too many plays of no intrinsic worth whatever are written and produced merely because they have "film possibilities." Worse still, Broadway actors have begun slavishly to imitate—and critics to acclaim—the style of anaemic and mawkish underplaying that Hollywood evolved to cloak as far as possible the deficiencies of those of its stars whose physical attributes far outweigh their histrionic capabilities.

No doubt, so long as the American theatre continues to be served by its stalwarts—its Sherwoods, O'Neills, Connells and Lunts—it will have much to offer that is worthy of serious consideration, in addition to its adroitly manufactured light comedies and its well turned out musicals. At the same time, if it is to escape the ultimate fate of becoming a mere appendage to Hollywood, it must quickly rally to its cause young men and women of imagination and ability, who will not worship mammon and who are inspired with an inalienable devotion to the traditions and potentialities of the stage.

# ADJUDICATIO AD ABSURDUM

*by John Bourne*

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**I**N spite of all its critics—and I have been one of the naughtiest—the British Drama League has done basically good work for drama festivals in laying down rules, evolving a marking system and giving guidance to adjudicators.

The great need for authoritative control and some degree of standardisation (whilst recognising artistic latitude) has been strongly brought home to me by experiences which have proved the absurdity of adjudication under ill-conceived procedure. The following are actual happenings, told without exaggeration. In no case was the festival under the auspices of the B.D.L.; but it is only fair to add that many non-B.D.L. festivals are wisely conducted under B.D.L. or other well-considered rules.

In Northern Ireland this year I found that the spoken adjudication in a three-weeks' annual festival had, on three previous occasions, been saved up until the last night. On that evening no play was performed. The adjudicator was the sole "turn" and had spoken for, roughly two to three hours. As I had been invited to deal with twenty-six one-act plays and thirteen full-length plays, I requested that the system should be changed, and that I should be allowed to speak at each session. The Committee was sharply divided on the subject. There was a feeling that the audience would not stay and that, if they did, it would affect the attendance on the last night. Eventually, I succeeded in getting permission to speak very briefly and began with about five minutes. The audience stayed. Afterwards, I gradually increased the time to fifteen minutes, still inadequate.

But the powers-that-be continued to be anxious about that last night, since they were determined to carry on with it. When "the night" arrived, the place was packed and many people were turned away. I then had to find something fresh to say about the twenty-six one-act plays and thirteen full-length plays. It took me about two and a half hours, with one short interval.

Imagine, however, what had happened in previous years, and what would have happened to the entrants this year if some change had not been made.

It was worked out for me that, approximately, each one-act play could be given not more than three minutes adjudication, and each full-length play not more than four minutes. It must be realised that the majority of the audience on the last night had not attended earlier in the festival (or only occasionally) and, therefore, merely heard snippets about the various performances. Many of the players could not get in; and they, too, had to be content with the exceptionally brief comments I had managed to introduce each evening. Thus, even this year, under slightly improved conditions, no entrant or audience received a thorough adjudication as we know it under B.D.L. administration.

Northern Ireland does not stand alone. At some of the English Music and Drama Festivals, short plays and excerpts, mainly Shakespearean, have to be dealt with at extreme speed. I have "adjudicated" (save the mark!) on as many as forty-three in one day. As the sessions were in different places—and even adjudicators must eat—time must be allowed for intervals in working out how long one could allot for comment on each performance—certainly not more than two minutes. Incidentally, a written report admittedly brief, had to be done *whilst the play was in progress*. There was no time, between items, other than to add a word or two.

Inadequate time, however, is not the only absurdity of much so-called adjudication. Sometimes, on arrival, the drama judge is told "We haven't any rules or marking system—you must make your own." The result is that the poor entrants are often confronted with a ruling which they had no reason to expect and which did not apply the previous week at another festival. In such cases, I always adopt the B.D.L. system and announce it. But even that may cause a surprise. For example, the B.D.L. rules suggest that, under "production," more sympathy shall be shown to a play with a large cast. I had an instance recently in which two performances were equal in quality. One play had seven people in it; the other had fifteen. Hence I tipped the balance in favour of the larger cast. But the societies concerned had not previously been told that B.D.L. rules would apply and supporters of the smaller-cast society felt they had been hardly done by, especially as only two weeks previously I had placed their performance an easy first in another festival where other rules were in force.

Awards to individuals give every adjudicator a nightmare. It is almost impossible, and may be grossly unfair, to pick, as I have had to do, "the best" actor and actress out of 300, or even fifty. If a maid or a butler is 100 per cent. efficient in a play, should they not be as much in the running as Lady Macbeth and Othello? Besides which, individual awards savour too much of the star system and are inimical to the group spirit. Such awards always create jealousies, even in the company in which the winner works. In at least one festival within my knowledge, the marking sheet had spaces not only for the *best* but the *worst* actor and actress in each play!

Another absurdity of adjudication is to be asked to speak in front of the curtain immediately after each one-act play, instead of waiting until the end of the session. Certainly this saves time ; but at what cost ! Usually, the players are hurried into the auditorium in their costume and make-up and made to stand against the wall where all can see their embarrassed or smiling reactions to the adjudication. Crashes and bangs go on behind the curtain as the next scene is being set. Some of the audience go out for refreshment, and the wretched judge finds concentration at a minimum. On one occasion, a stage hand, moving a sofa, butted me through the curtain and precipitated me full tilt into the front row of seats ! My spectacles, and those of the elderly lady on whom I fell, were broken. My wrist still has a protruding lump from the jolt it got. (By the by, it *might* have been much less fun than the audience enjoyed at the time. Does your insurance cover such a calamity?).

Not long ago, I struck the last word in absurdity at a Youth Festival. The Committee had unanimously decided that the young players would be helped if the lights were kept on in the auditorium during all the performances so that they could see their friends and relations. Also, that the producer of each play should sit with the adjudicator and point out to him all the "difficulties" so that he could make excuses accordingly !

It is true that "influences" like that do not often come the adjudicator's way ; but I have often wondered what entrants to a week's festival would have thought had they known that the secretary came to my hotel before the opening performance to present me with the complete programme. "I've marked the likely winners in blue pencil," he announced !

There is, of course, growing laxity in the choice of adjudicators. The size of the fee is too often the only consideration. The worst case I have met was when an unknown woman wrote to me and asked me to tell her, by return of post, how to adjudicate. She confessed that she had never attended a festival and had rarely seen a one-act play. Was there such a thing as a marking system and what were the main points to look for ? She had actually been appointed by a County Council Education Committee ! I advised her (by return of post, too) to decline the job in the interests of the entrants. But she didn't !

It would, however, be unbalanced to omit occasional absurdity of adjudicators themselves. We have all been guilty. Until one has learned by experience to be tactful without being dishonest, the greatest temptation is to point out personal faults without thinking twice. This inevitably leads to some dreadful "bricks" being dropped as when, in my callow days, I was fool enough to describe a grimly severe Cleopatra as more like an official behind a Post Office counter. Unfortunately, the player happened to be a seller of stamps at the local G.P.O.

Still worse is the adjudicator who airs personal likes and dislikes in plays—a fatal blunder and quite unjudicial. Even in 1946, I have known an adjudicator



cator place a performance first solely because "this has always been my pet play"; whilst another adjudicator, after praising the acting and production of *This Happy Breed*, downed it on the ground that he had never liked the work of Noel Coward. A B.D.L. Final board of judges once dropped an astonishing "brick" when they discountenanced an excerpt from Shakespeare as a festival choice.

Adjudicators are constantly urged to be constructive; yet how is it possible to be if, as frequently happens, no book of the play is supplied well beforehand? The B.D.L. and S.C.D.A. rightly insist on this being done—and so should all adjudicators. Still another absurdity of adjudication is when, at a non-competitive festival, an instruction is given to criticise the performances frankly, yet not to give any indication of preferences. This is impossible without insincerity, and is the reason why so-called non-competitive festivals—unless the adjudication is strictly private to each entrant—are, by dangerous implication, as competitive as any others, and cause even more heartburnings.

Last but by no means least in my list of absurdities is the adjudicator—and I have known several—who attempts to frame a departmentalised marking system with machine-like workings. I have such a chart in front of me as I write. It has twenty-eight sections. Under the heading of "Speech," five marks maximum are awarded for Emotion. "Diction" is kept separate with another five marks. "Stress" has five marks to itself; and so has "Interpretation of Lines." Under "Characterisation," a section called "Truth and Conception of Character" is kept distinct from "Execution of Characterisation." On the sheet I am studying, it happens that the performing company is shown as receiving full marks for the Execution of characterisation, although they were awarded only two-thirds of the maximum marks for its Truth and Conception!

"Adjudicatio ad Absurdum." Yes—it is too often a good title to our job. But it need not be if organisers and adjudicators would see the futility, unhelpfulness and injustice of being laws unto themselves; and, instead, would line themselves up with some recognised authority and take advice from individuals and organisations (like the League) with long and national experience.

In spite of all that has been said against festivals—generally by people who are afraid to come out of isolation or to get a new perspective on themselves—they can be immensely valuable. In most cases, a festival provides the only independent criticism a society gets in a year. Festivals help the uninitiated in the audience to a greater appreciation of true theatre standards; and they encourage the playwright since nothing gives him, outside a wide professional acceptance, such an impetus as a festival success.

But, in my opinion, the value of adjudication is waning, either because of petty limitations on the one hand, or a lack of control on the other. Adjudication should be far too considered and responsible a job ever to earn the title "Adjudicatio ad absurdum."

# A NOTE FROM BELGIUM

by Romain Sanvic

DEEP interest and high controversy have followed in Belgium the public announcement, by the Ministry of Education, of a double National Theatre, endowed by the State : French in Brussels, Flemish in Antwerp.

The policy is quite different for each of them. In Antwerp the Minister has selected a permanent stock company of Flemish actors of experience, all professional, who are working on the Repertory system, with a very extensive range of plays. They'll have to visit other towns, on tour, but they'll keep their seat in Antwerp and they'll work practically as they have done for years.

The "Comédiens Routiers" of Brussels, on the other hand, under the management of the brothers Jacques and Maurice Huysman, are a relatively recent company of semi-amateurs, who have been wandering all over the country with a few carefully selected plays having a wide appeal to popular audiences. Their first successes have been kinds of pageants or mimic plays, broad farces, with songs and dances, or *comédias dell arte* in the old Italian fashion. Their performances are always organised in such a way that they can easily travel from village to village, and they erect their temporary theatre in a few hours, with full settings and decoration. Their ingenuity in that respect is admirable.

The best production they have given so far is certainly M. Herman Closson's legendary play : "Les Quatre Fils Aymon," which is a dramatisation of an old medieval epic saga, with the emperor Charlemagne in the background.

During the German occupation, the play met with such enthusiastic receptions and gave vent to so many patriotic outbursts from the audience, that the military authority took fear and banned it. After a few weeks, the play was again produced under a new title, and with no mention of the author's name, and the Germans no longer objected, although not a single syllable had been altered in the dialogue.

It was not the first time, however, that the Germans had been blindfolded by the Routiers. Russian plays were of course strictly prohibited, but in spite of the censor the Routiers ventured to produce Chekov's "The Bear," which delighted the audience. But they gave the play a new fancy title and announced it on the programme as an adaptation from a Rumanian comedy, author unnamed. The Germans never discovered the trick.

Now, it is expected that the Routiers will adapt themselves to their new mission. The first show they gave under their official denomination, Théâtre

*"Les quatre Fils Aymon," by Herman Closson.  
Costumes by Glaine Limbosch. (Photo: Hensler)  
Performed by Les Comédiens Routiers.*



National, was Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The production was original, the costumes delightful, the ballet (at Capulet's dance) charming, but too long. Of course, the technique of these young actors has to improve, but on the whole their zest and pluck overcome the occasional defects and win them warm applause from crowded houses.

It is to be hoped that the British Public will soon have the opportunity of seeing them. A performance of *Romeo and Juliet* in England would of course be premature, but I would suggest M. Closson's fine dramatic evocation of Belgium's past glories. The play is unpretentious. There is nothing pompous nor high-browish in this simple and straightforward story of four brothers, deeply devoted to each other, who rebel against Charlemagne's haughty wrath and tyranny. The use of masks in comic episodes is extremely efficient. The acting of the Routiers is based chiefly on rough humour and direct grip of a dramatic situation. It has been said that no other company of actors succeed like them in rendering on the stage the turmoil and the vivid confusion of a fight. Their mimicry has been highly praised even by their worst detractors. There is much to be hoped of these youthful and disciplined players who have had an opportunity denied to most other groups of the kind.

## THE EDITOR'S PAGE

THE experimental Full-Length Play Festival organised by the Drama League is now in full swing, in that the performances, by no fewer than 194 entrants, are being visited every night by one or other of the Festival adjudicators. The maximum number of entries comes from the Eastern Area with eighty productions. Then comes the Northern Area with seventy-one, including eight teams from Scotland. Last comes the Western Area with forty-three performances, including eight teams from Wales. All the preliminary performances will be over by Christmas. Thereafter the Northern Area will hold a week's Regional Final at Rochdale, from January 27th to February 1st. From the other two areas the adjudicators will select the best teams direct—two from the Eastern Area and one from the Western. A final of the five best performances seen throughout the country will take place in the early Spring at a convenient centre. The possibility of a single performance in London of the best of all the plays is being considered.

Many thanks are due to the organisers of this Festival who have voluntarily undertaken a big piece of work. And to the eight judges whose services have been engaged for the Festival, namely, Hugh Allen, Rupert Harvey, Gordon Lea, Mrs. Margaret Marshall, Miss Dorothy Pickering, C. B. Purdom, Ross Salmon and A. H. Wharrier.

We are glad to announce the appointment by the Drama League of a third travelling Drama Instructor in the person of Mr. Frank Newman, who will take up his duties in January next. Students at our recent

Drama Schools at Cheltenham and York will remember Mr. Newman as one of the members of the teaching staff. Before the war Mr. Newman was a member of Sir Ben Greet's Company, and after serving for five years in the Royal Navy he joined the staff of the Preparatory Academy of the R.A.D.A., where he took classes in acting, production, diction, verse appreciation, costume and the history of the theatre. We feel that Mr. Newman is thus peculiarly qualified for his work with us, and that he will prove a valuable collaborator with Miss Frances Mackenzie and Mrs. Selby.

We regret that rumours have reached us to the effect that the Drama League turns a cold shoulder on the formation of Local Theatre Guilds. How such an impression can have got abroad we cannot understand, for as shown in our Annual Report, printed in this issue of "Drama," the League has already assisted in the formation of several new Guilds, while we have always been in the most friendly relations with the older local organisations affiliated to the League such as the Erith Theatre Guild, the Doncaster and District Drama League, and the Birmingham Amateur Dramatic Federation, which was in abeyance during the war, but which we are now delighted to learn is in course of revival. In the next number of "Drama" Miss Ann Davies will contribute an article on the purpose and function of Theatre Guilds which we believe will be very useful to those who contemplate such.

We note a welcome tendency among Art Galleries and Libraries to make space available for productions of amateur societies, and we are glad to learn that the Manchester Central Library has been freed by a Bill in Parliament from irksome restrictions which forbade the hiring out of their well-equipped theatre for amateur use. It must be admitted, however, that at any rate in the case of Manchester, the prices charged for the hire of a theatre accommodating approximately 250 (as much as £8 8s. *od.* for a Saturday evening, exclusive of lighting) would seem prohibitive if the theatre is to be used by the smaller educational amateur societies in the district. The public-spirited action of the Authorities in this and other cases may be largely invalidated unless more reasonable fees can be offered.

## THE RURAL SCENE

OUTSIDE the major societies, who usually have special selection committees for the purpose, there is one question that is asked more often than any other in the theatre, and that is "what play shall we do?" I say "in the theatre" because this is a question that meets and too often defeats professionals and amateurs alike. In the countryside it is asked so often, especially at this time of year, that it becomes a kind of autumnal theme song dropping from so very many lips as the leaves fall from the trees. The question is usually given in a tone of humorous resignation, as though the questioner had little hope of a reasonable answer, and the person asked, as he hears that doomlike request, gives a quite perceptible wince, and his eyes go blank. For it is the very dickens of a question.

As the curtain rises in the Rural Scene there is no doubt what one will usually see, a programme of One-Acts. They have two advantages. First, you can have different casts for each and this simplifies the problem of rehearsal times, which is always a real problem. For your country folk do not as a rule regard acting as that passionate hobby it becomes to the performers in the city societies and the Little Theatres. The first call on their evenings is made by the hay and corn harvests, by their gardens, by the many other interests of rural life. Secondly, the one-act play does not demand quite the same persistence of control as the three-act, it is on the whole rather easier.

On the other hand, there is more room to move in the longer, and undoubtedly the more ambitious group will soon tire of a diet of short plays, as indeed will an audience, who certainly prefer one story in an evening. There are in fact three separate problems here, the one-act programme, the three-act and the variety.

Quite frankly I would dismiss the variety show at once as being far too specialised a craft for rural areas. I have seen many, but never one which was even moderately good. They depend, like farce, on a technical equipment which is only attained after considerable training and experience, especially do they demand a control of an audience which is very rare indeed among amateurs. They are as a rule shame-making. Avoid them.

Turning to plays, there are two golden rules, well-known one would think to everyone nowadays, but alas often neglected. The first is that you must choose a play

which is possible for you, which can in performance satisfy and sharpen your artistic conscience. You have an artistic conscience, have you not? You do not measure your success, I trust, by the applause of your audience, or the nice things mother says afterwards? Because if you do you are in a bad way indeed. Actors must always be the trainers of their audiences. The latter, you know, are still groundlings; indeed they are. They will laugh, how they will laugh, at almost anything. And so great is their kindness and eagerness for entertainment that they will applaud to the echo without discretion. The first fifty lines of Hamlet, Act III, scene 2, are still as true as when they were first minted.

You must choose then, a play suited by your cast, suited by your stage and within your powers as a producer, and yet if possible one which you think is rather too difficult, and which will be something of an adventure. The comedy of manners, in which all the birds are dressed in fine feathers, and must wear them to the manner born, is not for you. And yet everyone wants to do *Blithe Spirit*, and do it, just like Mrs. Mop, they indubitably will.

The second golden rule is never to choose a play because there is no royalty, or because the royalty is so small. Many bad plays carry a royalty, but few good plays are free, except the classics. The cheap play will always be cheap, you cannot disguise it, and it is the most appalling waste of your time to put good effort into it.

But how, and this is the crux, is the play to be found? Fortunately in many counties now there are full-time resident experts called County Drama Advisers, whose job it is to give advice on just this question. If you have one in your county, ask him to come and meet your players and then advise you. Lists of plays, especially short lists, are some use, but the best thing of all is to discuss such a list with an expert who has seen your probable cast and the stage on which you are to perform. Short lists of between fifty and a hundred plays in categories can be very useful. If you have no County Drama Adviser get one of these.

There remains one answer to the question of what to act which leads one into the most exciting country of all, at least for the producer, that is what might be described as an imaginative and experimental compilation. Perhaps this may be considered in a future number.

LEO BAKER

# THE AMERSHAM LITTLE THEATRE



IN 1936 Miss Sally Latimer founded the Amersham Repertory Players, opening in their present premises on Boxing Night. The enterprise flourished and Miss Caryl Jenner joined Miss Latimer as co-director. Presently they purchased the theatre and greatly increased its amenities by adding a lounge-restaurant. Working together—Miss Latimer mostly acting and Miss Jenner mostly producing, but on occasion each doing anything and everything—they have made the Repertory Theatre the rather unique institution it is to-day. Recently they instituted a fortnightly exchange system with the Guildford Repertory Theatre which is run by two brothers who were formerly at Amersham. This allows more ample time for rehearsal and in consequence the standard of both companies has improved.

Notable among the Amersham activities is the Theatre Group of Students, limited to about twelve, a number which enables the Directors to apply stringent tests to applicants so that only the most promising are admitted. Innumerable scripts are sent in for consideration, and all are read, but the Directors find few that are acceptable, often because authors do not appreciate the limitations of a repertory theatre. All these activities (and more besides) are the work of one of the smallest professional companies in the country.

Amersham Playhouse holds only 233.

The Company added to a long list of successes when in August last it presented Rosa de Leon's version of *Dombey and Son*. Dickens' characters often seem to be larger than life; to be caricatures rather than real people; in fact, to be "theatrical." Thus, translated to the medium of the theatre they appear in an element natural to them. And what characters there are in this play! Captain Cuttle; old Sol Gills and his nephew Walter; Mr. Toots; the incomparable Nipper, and the oily Mr. Carker. Although in appearance hardly portraying the dark imperious Edith of the book, Katie Kemp lacked nothing of Edith's cold disdainfulness. Clair Pollock made a delicate and shrinking Florence, and Patrick Barton as the formidable Mr. Dombey was admirable. The reconciliation scene with Florence was beautifully done, though she, with all her timidity, might surely have been expected to show more alarm at the sight of the revolver in her father's hand.

Dickens, of course, leaves no loose ends, and the wheel never fails to turn full circle, so no shadow remained to cloud the final party scene (illustrated above from a photograph by Bernard Jay), and all was bathed in the rosy glow of a happy ending. Here indeed was a richness not often found in modern plays.

D.H.

# A YEAR'S WORK

**I**N submitting the Twenty-seventh Annual Report of the British Drama League, the Council record that on October 31st, 1945, the League's membership stood at 5,805. It is now 6,767, showing (after allowing for resignations) a net increase of 962. As against the 4,247 affiliated organisations on the register last year, the total has now risen to 4,711.

## ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The Annual Conference of the League which had not taken place during the War was revived at Birmingham from May 31st to June 2nd. Over 450 delegates were present and a full report of the Conference meetings has been sent to members while the Conference as a whole was described in an article by Mr. Philip Lorraine in the August number of "Drama." The Council of the League is taking steps to implement the resolutions passed at the Business Meeting.

## THE LIBRARY

Since the date of the last report 6,456 books have been added to the Library, including replacements; 17,125 reading sets have been issued to members, while 16,500 single copies of plays and 1,762 critical works have been borrowed. These figures compare with 16,071 sets, 15,189 single copies and 1,387 critical works during the previous year.

The Library Committee has met three times in the course of the year, and among matters which have claimed its attention has been the necessity of providing better accommodation for members wishing to read and study in the Library. It was decided to erect a partition in the Lecture Room, thus providing two rooms, the larger giving ample space for a Reading Room. The work has now been completed and it is hoped that this change will provide a welcome amenity. The room will be shelved to accommodate the Archer Collection on its return from the Bodleian Library, where it was sent for safety in 1940, and for whose hospitality in this matter during the past six years the Library Committee's thanks are due.

In the course of the year the Library has received a bequest of books from the late Mrs. M. Osborne, and gifts from Miss Marie Ney, Mrs. Enthoven, Mrs. E. C. Veal, Mrs. C. Somerset, Mr. S. Watson and others, and these are gratefully acknowledged by the Library Committee.

## DRAMA SCHOOLS

A regular programme of Schools and Courses has again been organised throughout the year. Spring and Autumn Courses, at which the numbers were limited to twenty-five students, were held on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings. There was a Week-end Course in the Christmas holidays (seventy-four students) and a five-day Course at Easter (sixty-seven students). All these were held in the Practice Theatre. Two residential Summer Schools of one week in August and September were held at Cheltenham College (174 students) and St. John's College, York (135 students). A party of fifteen Danish students attended the Cheltenham School under the auspices of the British Council.

Speakers and lecturers at all Courses included: Mr. John Allen, Mr. Wilton Anstey, Miss Sybil Attwell, "Bert," Miss Anny Boalsh, Mr. John Burrell, Mrs. Chater, Miss Esme Church, Mrs. Collingwood-Selby, Miss Heather Conway, Mr. Eric Crozier, Miss Nancy Fisher, Mr. Peter Flook, Mr. Stanley Garner, Miss Alison Graham-Campbell, Mr. Charles Hawtrey, Mr. R. J. B. A. Laban, The Rev. Philip Lamb, Mr. Gordon Lea, Miss Frances Mackenzie, Mr. Michael MacOwan, Mr. Norman Marshall, Mr. Bernard Miles, Mr. Frank Newman, Mr. Robert G. Newton, Miss Valerie Prentiss, Miss C. Ross-Mackenzie, Mr. Frank Sladen-Smith, Miss Lisa Ullmann, Capt. André Van Gyseghem, Mr. A. H. Wharrier, Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth, Mr. Robin Whitworth.

Miss Mackenzie and Mrs. Collingwood Selby have also undertaken short Schools, Lectures and Adjudications at the following places: Beaconsfield Parents' Education Association, Portsmouth; Kent W.I.; Essex W.I.; North London T.W.G.; Northumberland W.I.; Surrey W.I.; Northampton W.I.; London Army Education; London W.R.N.S.; Cambridgeshire R.C.C.; W. Sussex W.I.; Ipswich Co-operative Soc.; Felixstowe; North London Theatre Guild; Cheltenham; Colwyn Bay; Langdale; Nuneaton; London Co-operative Union; Barry Road Methodists; London Assoc. of Ex. W.R.N.S.; Cumberland W.I.; Limsfield W.I.; Winchester; Slough; Bishops Castle W.I.; Wolverhampton\*; Bury St. Edmunds W.I.\*; Dorset; Eastern Command H.M. Forces; Hendon; New Barkby W.I.; Dalston (Cumberland).

\* These engagements were taken by substitutes owing to Mrs. Selby's special leave.



#### SERVICE OF YOUTH

There has been an increased demand for Lecturers and Adjudicators. The League has assisted in supplying adjudicators for many Youth Festivals. A particularly large festival was held in Surrey, and adjudicators were supplied for twenty-two preliminary and semi-finals and one final festival.

Miss Mackenzie and Mrs. Collingwood Selby have undertaken Short Schools, Lectures and Adjudications for Youth Organisations as follows:—

London Union of Girls Clubs; Shropshire Youth Committee; Reading Youth Committee; Wembley Youth Committee; South Stoke Youth Committee; St. Albans Youth Committee; Basingstoke Youth Festival Committee; London Crossways Club; South Suburban Co-operative Society; Hayes Youth Committee; Oxford Youth Committee; Oxford University Scout Club; Whitchurch (Salop) Youth Committee; Finchley Youth Committee; Heston & Isleworth Youth Committee.

#### PRACTICE THEATRE

During the period under review the Practice Theatre has been let during the winter term every day to the Preparatory Academy of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, and on two days a week during the Spring and Summer Terms to the Cone School. During term time the Practice Theatre has been booked regularly each week by Morley College Theatre School, and by Miss V. Guignard for private classes. Short schools and ten-week Courses have been held by the British Drama League, and the Speech Fellowship and Shaw Society have engaged the Theatre for their monthly meetings. The sum of £146 11s. 3d. has been received for the hire of the Theatre. A further £22 3s. 4d. is due for the hire of the Practice Theatre in September and October, 1946.

#### CRITICISM OF PLAYS

One hundred and twenty-three MSS. have been read and criticisms supplied during the year as compared with 150 last year. Twenty students are taking the Correspondence Course in Playwriting.

#### COMMUNITY THEATRE FESTIVAL

Arrangements for the revival of the One-act Play Festival are in full swing and an account of this activity will appear in next year's report. A new enterprise which is being undertaken during the 1946-47 season is a Full Length Play Festival, several performances of which have already taken place. For the purpose of this Festival the country is divided into three Areas and in the first round teams are visited on their own ground from which the best will be selected for further performance.

#### THEATRE GUILDS

The League has been glad to welcome the formation of several Theatre Guilds during the present year and where a desire to form a Guild is expressed on behalf of several organisations every assistance is given to promote this activity. The following have been established and are affiliated to the League:—North London Theatre Guild, Erith Theatre Guild, Southampton Theatre Guild, Medway Theatre Guild, Liverpool Theatre Guild, West London Theatre Guild, Croydon and District Theatre Guild, and the Bristol Guild of Players. There are, of course, many other organisations linked to the League which are doing the same work though under other titles such as the Tyneside Association for Music, Drama and the Arts, and Doncaster and District Drama League.

#### COSTUME COUPONS

The Drama League Advisory Committee to the Board of Trade for the rationing of material for amateur stage costumes has met at frequent intervals during the year. 118 requests for coupons have been received, of which 108 have been granted either in whole or in part.

#### THE LEAGUE OVERSEAS

Progress is reported from the Australian Branch of the British Drama League which is just ten years old. Its membership is increasing and the Library in Sydney now contains more than 2,500 volumes. 400 copies of every issue of "Drama" are despatched to the Australian Branch. We were glad to welcome the visit to England this year of Miss Alice Gould, who represented Australia at the Birmingham Conference.

The League has also been glad to welcome during the year, through the British Council, visitors from Malta, Holland, Belgium, Greece and Norway. Copies of "Drama" are sent under the aegis of the British Council to British Institutes in Cairo, Malta, Baghdad, Lisbon, Madrid, and also to the principal countries in South America. The League is represented by the Director on the Theatre Section on the National Co-operating Body for UNESCO.

In June, at the request of the British Council, the League loaned two models for display at the Exhibition of Theatrical Designs and Models for South America.

At the invitation of the Admiralty Education Department, and under the auspices of the Central Advisory Council for Education in H.M. Forces, Miss Mackenzie visited Malta to adjudicate an Inter-Services Festival and to give a series of lectures to Naval personnel.

## SOUTH AFRICAN THEATRE

THE fortunes of war led millions of men into new experiences, few of them pleasant. I was lucky, the Fates decreed that I should spend several years in South Africa, where I found not only oranges, sunshine and a colour-bar but . . . a theatre. That may surprise you, for we English have never been known to show much interest in the cultural development of the rest of the Commonwealth. I worked in the drama groups of the Union and saw most phases of dramatic activity; I found a growing enthusiasm for the theatre that, however, needs to be guided and directed if it is to become a significant factor in the life of the people. Some central organisation is badly needed to assist in the building of theatres, to co-ordinate the work of the existing groups and to create others, and to secure more co-operation between groups playing in English and those speaking Afrikaans. That is why I welcome the recent move of the South African Association of Arts towards achieving this objective.

I can only deal here with the English-speaking theatre—and that briefly—but as a starting point, let us consider the tours made during the War by Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies and Marda Vanne with locally-recruited companies. The names of these two West-End actresses were sufficiently well-known to secure the co-operation of the company owning the largest chain of theatres in Africa—otherwise no tour would have been possible—and so for a few nights each year many a local “bioscope” (for South Africa still prefers the delightfully archaic title) is given over to the living theatre. The plays toured were certainly of as high a standard as the circumstances justified—they were never merely “star vehicles” and production levels remained consistently high. We saw Shakespeare, Coward, Barrie and, this year, Emyln Williams’ *Wind of Heaven* and the same playwright’s adaptation of *A Month in the Country*.

It was suggested that in these tours were the beginnings of a South African national theatre, but whilst recognising their entertainment value, I always felt that they were too haphazard, too dependent on financial success and insufficiently rooted even to represent the English-speaking side of a permanent national organisation. That is why I used to stress the need for encouraging the drama group by some kind of disinterested backing and support. I mentioned the work that had been done in Britain by the Arts Council, the British Drama League and Unity Theatre Society, suggesting how features of

each might be adapted to meet local needs.

As an example of the kind of theatre group that I felt could produce the best results and might serve as a prototype for a national theatre scheme I should like to tell you something of The Cape Town Repertory Theatre Society, which is fortunate in that it is permitted to use the finely-equipped University Little Theatre. This group’s joint occupancy with the students results in the public seeing about ten plays a year, a programme carefully planned and co-ordinated by the Controller, Professor Donald Inskip. If you looked through my list of productions since 1932 you would agree that few English groups could show a better record, judged from artistic standards . . . but if you complain that there is not a single locally-written play in the list, then I must admit that you have put your finger on a weakness of the English-speaking theatre in South Africa. The Society contends that as yet no new work worthy of performance has been submitted. Personally, I rather doubt whether sufficient encouragement has been offered to budding playwrights. If there was a slight falling-off in artistic standards during the War, it may be an explanation, if not altogether an excuse, to say that over £6,000 was raised for war charities during this period. Even so, I can remember excellent productions of Bernard’s *Martine*, Shaw’s *Mrs. Warren’s Profession*, Steinbeck’s *Moon is Down*, Tchekov’s *Cherry Orchard*, Barrie’s *The Boy David*, and many more that could scarcely be classed as sops to the box office. The Society has a number of producers on call, the casting is quite unrestricted in any way, and, back-stage, Cecil Pym, full-time set designer and builder, is an artist and craftsman whose work would, in England, have ensured for him a much wider reputation.

The University of Cape Town provides an excellent Drama Department under the guidance of Miss van der Gucht, which annually turns out a score or more promising pupils who often, alas, return to parts of the Union where they have little opportunity of developing their talents. The University productions are quite rightly of a more experimental nature than those of the Repertory Theatre Society, and the casts are often leavened with experienced local players in the more mature roles. *Family Portrait*, an American play based on the life of Christ, Beatrice Mayor’s *Pleasure Garden* and, quite recently, *The Insect Play* and *The Skin of our Teeth* are amongst the most successful University productions.

JAMES MARCH

# THE OLD VIC

THE Governors of the Old Vic, realising that the War has started up a new interest in the theatre throughout the country, have given their full support to a plan for expansion.

The first step which the Governors have taken was to invite Michel Saint-Denis, who before the war directed the London Theatre Studio, Glen Byam Shaw and George Devine to form and direct The Old Vic Theatre Centre. The second step was to make available as premises for this the original Old Vic building in the Waterloo Road.

Although this theatre was badly damaged by bombing, the Directors of the centre are now preparing to establish there an organisation for training, research and development in all forms of theatre activity around a Theatre School, a Theatre for Children, and later on, a Theatre in the Centre open to the general public.

In the re-construction of the interior of the Old Vic building, an attempt will be made to devise a stage and auditorium, related to each other in a way which will enable a play of any period to be presented in its appropriate theatrical and architectural convention.

During the next three years, through the work in the school and the Young Vic, the Directors of the Centre hope to bring together sufficient people in all branches (authors, musicians, actors, directors, designers, technicians) for the start of the work in this theatre. Once opened, the Theatre, as the focal point of the Centre, will be completely self-contained, having its own workshops, and enabling all the work necessary for the preparation of a production to be carried out on the premises.

The Old Vic Theatre Centre, when fully established, will present a theatre and an organisation which might well act as a basis for the construction and organisation of other Centres throughout the country.

"The Young Vic" will open at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, on Boxing Day, 1946, for a five and a half weeks' season and then go on tour. The School is opening on the 16th January, 1947, and one group of acting and technical course students will be selected from applications now being received. The Theatre will open to the public in the Autumn of 1949.

## PLAYS

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## THEATRE BOOKSHELF

"*A History of Late Nineteenth-Century Drama, 1850-1900*," by Allardyce Nicoll. *Two vols. Cambridge University Press. Vol. I, 15s. od. Vol. II, 25s. od.*

PROFESSOR Nicoll has increased the debt which all students of the drama owe to his scholarship and untiring energy by these two volumes which bring, alas, his history of the English drama to a close. It is to be hoped that this may not be the last word, for the seeds which were sown in the theatre in the nineteenth century have produced astonishing fruits in our own time and we cannot but wish to see the record of them set down and illumined for us while they are still part of our contemporary life.

In these volumes, the steady evolution of the drama is traced from the now forgotten melodramas and farces of the middle of the last century to their culmination, in the 'eighties, in the work of Henry Arthur Jones and Pinero, and so to the dramatic "revolution" of the nineties and the beginning of the "modern" theatre.

It is, of course, in this "revolution" that our interest to-day mainly lies, but Professor Nicoll's survey emphasises also the importance of the vital changes in stage presentation which had their origin earlier in the century. The introduction of gas-lighting and the cyclorama, the use of the box-set in place of the conventional wings and back-cloth and, above all, the important step forward with the advent of the stage-director or producer—these were changes which marked a significant advance from the old style of stage presentation which had remained unaltered since the Restoration.

No review of this work would be complete without mention of the hand-list of plays which comprises the second volume; a list which must surely be exhaustive and which will certainly prove invaluable to students of the period.

DOROTHY COATES

"*Questions Answered on Amateur Acting*," by Rose Tenent. *Jordan & Sons. 2s. 6d.*

This tiny book is in the form of a catechism and certainly manages to answer satisfactorily many questions, not only about acting, but about all manner of other amateur problems as well. Adjudicators, however, will scarcely thank the authoress for the strange advice to deliver lines at least twice as slowly as in ordinary life; few lighting experts will agree that amber is the best for daylight; and it is surely unnecessary nowadays for amateurs

to devote their profits to charity "whenever possible."

"*The Best One-act Plays of 1944-45*." Selected by J. W. Marriott. *Harrap. 8s. 6d.*

J. W. Marriott feels that the plays selected for this well-known series this year are more serious than usual; in any case, they appear to be more unequal than is usual. Two of the best are Philip Johnson's *Dark Brown* (2 m., 5 w.), a thriller, skilfully given what amounts to a happy ending, and Patricia Chown's *The Sea-Shell* (1 m., 6 w.), showing successive stages in the life of Daisy Spriggs, charwoman. Joe Corrie's *The Failure* (3 m., 2 w.), is a surprising indictment of the Scottish passion for education. There is a tragedy of the war in Norway by Norman Dawson, an effective after-war drama by Mikhail Aklom, a fantasy by Gregory Ames, a semi-poetic piece by Ken Etheridge, a sanatorium play by Lake Aske, and a light study of modern conditions by Harold Brighouse, which, with the picture of post-war German officers by Norman Holland, is the nearest approach to comedy in the book.

F. SLADEN-SMITH

"*British Theatre*," by Peter Noble. *British Yearbooks. 21s.*

To survey the British stage from September, 1939, to the Spring of 1946 is no light undertaking, and Peter Noble, although he writes almost exclusively of London productions, covers a wide field pretty thoroughly. His tastes are catholic and show but little bias in any one direction. He ranges from disappointment at Coward's last revue to superlative praise of the Old Vic. Company's seasons: two adjacent paragraphs contain a short analytical appreciation of *Hedda Gabler* and her interpretation by Sonia Dresdel and praise of Sid Field in *Sirike a New Note*. Neither does he forget the National Theatre, the little theatres, the private theatres, the foreign language theatres, the negro theatre, players' marriages, A.B.C.A., E.N.S.A., C.E.M.A., or the British Drama League.

But the presentation of this interesting material is rather jerky. The author has imposed only the loosest of chronological patterns upon his collection of articles, essays and reviews, some of which seem to have been intended for ephemeral journalism. The result is a readable survey, but not a book of reference. An index would be invaluable.



JAMES AGATE

*One of the illustrations to "British Theatre" by Peter Noble, reviewed on the opposite page, showing the distinguished critic with his favourite Modigliani and his favourite brandy. From a photograph by Felix H. Man.*

More than a third of the volume is devoted to biographies. Many of the less well-established players appear in this list, but not authors such as Ardrey, Slater, Savory, Strode and Temple, all of whom are mentioned in the survey. There is a useful list of outstanding productions on the London stage during the period, with the names of the author, the producer, the designer and the cast. There are, too, very many and very excellent photographs—but here again the actor, in close up, has almost a monopoly, and hardly one picture shows a situation or a stage set.

"*Susanna*," by Margaret Haythorne. French. 2s. (2 f., 4 m.).

"*The Enemy*," by Frank Whitbourn. French. 1s. 6d. (1 f., 4 m.).

"*Shepherd's Pie*," by Mabel Constanduros. Howard Agg. French. 1s. 6d. (8 f.).

"*The Old Wives' Tale*," by William Dinner and William Morum. French. 1s. 6d. (4 f., 1 m.).

"*Smile Please!*" a collection of sketches. Fox. 3s.

The rhymed couplets and stylised manner in which the story of *Susanna* is narrated has a certain attractiveness. The hint of fantasciation and the pleasant melodies of Norman Suckling make this playlet a welcome change from realistic episodes such as the others in this group. *The Enemy* is a dramatic scene about a German Prisoner of War in 1917 who seeks shelter in a farmhouse. *Shepherd's Pie* is a neatly contrived comedy of misunderstandings; *The Old Wives' Tale* tells how three dear old ladies help on a young romance. The sketches in *Smile Please!* vary a good deal in length, size of cast, and quality: among the best are those by Denis Waldock and Anthony Armstrong.

"*Great is Diana*," by Alan Hadfield. Northern Lights Press, Harrogate. (3 f., 20 m., 6 children, 1 set).

"*There's Crime in the Jungle*," by Charles Barkaway. Tonbridge Free Press. 2s. 6d. (15 men or boys, and supers, 5 sets).

Mr. Hadfield himself describes his rather static play as depicting "the conflict of Jew and Greek and Christian, in Ephesus, during St. Paul's sojourn there. Main plot, the rebellion of Demetrius the Silversmith, with connected interludes concerning lovers and the play of children." *There's Crime in the Jungle* is a rattling adventure story for and about boys. Scouts and others would have great fun making the properties for this African yarn as well as acting in it.

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"Scandal at Barchester," by Vera Wheatley.  
French. 4s. (7 f., 10 m., 3 sets).

"A Soldier for Christmas," by Reginald Beckwith.  
French. 4s. (7 f., 3 m., 1 set).

"I'll see you again," by Romilly Cavan.  
Fox. 3s. 6d. (4 f., 3 m., 1 set).

Trollope's novel "The last chronicle of Barset," has been condensed into a very pleasant play. The characters remain as human as the novelist created them, and our chief regret is that the redoubtable Mrs. Proudie makes so brief an appearance. This storm in an ecclesiastical tea-cup about a clergyman unjustly accused provides us with escapism of excellent quality. The country week-end atmosphere of *A Soldier for Christmas* is enriched by a certain intellectual liveliness of dialogue. The plot hinted at in the title involves several engaging characters drawn from the highbrow fringe. *I'll see you Again* rather lacks body. The heroine writes intelligent novels for fame and gossip columns for money: she eventually solves complications involving her journalist husband, a convalescent young soldier, and a perfectly foul female waif.

ALWYN ANDREW

"Daybreak," by Catherine Shepherd. (7 m., 11 f.). 2s. 6d.

"Red Sky at Morning," by Dymphna Cusack. (3 m., 3 f.). 2s. 6d.

"Interval," by Sumner Lock-Elliott. (7 m., 7 f.). 2s. 6d.

"The Touch of Silk," by Betty Roland. (6 m., 5 f.). 2s. 6d.

(The above are published by Melbourne University Press.)

"Six Australian One-Act Plays," 5s.

"Lady in Danger," by Max Afford. (8 m., 3 f.). 5s.

"Wives Have Their Uses," by Gwen Meredith. (4 m., 6 f.). 4s. 4d.

"There is no Armour," by Lynn Foster. (9 m., 4 f.). 5s.

"Morning Sacrifice," by Dymphna Cusack. (9 f.). 4s. 3d.

"Caroline Chisholm," by George Landen Dann. (13 m., 21 f.). 5s.

"Sons of the Morning," by Catherine Duncan. (8 m., 1 f.). 5s.

(The above are published by Mulga Publications.)

"Ned Kelly," by Douglas Stewart. (17 m., 5 f.). 7s. 6d.

"Two Plays for Radio," 7s. 6d.

(The above are published by Angus and Robertson.)

"Quiet Night," by Dorothy Blewett. (3 m., 11 f.). Australasian Publishing Co.

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The foregoing batch of plays are published in Australia, and Australia is the scene of all except four of them. They range in time from 150 years ago, when cargoes of convicts were landed at Botany Bay, down to the present day. Once in the Dominion, the convicts worked in chain gangs, or as "assigned servants," sometimes being savagely ill-treated. Men, women and children were deported for offences which would hardly be indictable to-day, and the Australians therefore regard their "convicts" sympathetically, remembering their sufferings with pity. This sympathy is clearly shown in *Daybreak* and *Red Sky at Morning*. It is, in fact, their theme.

Next came the immigrants, seeking in a new country the security they had failed to find in the old. Many arrived almost penniless, to find no work or prospect of work. Among them were many young girls whose plight was soon desperate. To their aid came an Englishwoman who has become something of a legend, and the play *Caroline Chisholm* tells the story of her work among them. The settlers endured untold hardships. There were terrible droughts, when their sheep died off; there were devastating floods; there were bush fires. *There is no Armour* is a family saga (1858-1938) played against the background of these recurring catastrophes. Drought and despair are also the background of a modern play *The Touch of Silk*.

The story of the famous bushranger Kellys is excitingly told in *Ned Kelly*. The play is part verse, part prose, and certainly some of the speeches of these colourful outlaws are poetic enough. "Life? I'm a shadow in the shallow pool of her eyes," says one of them. The Kellys, who between them killed three policemen, held up a town for three days and planned to derail a train, had a reputation for chivalry, but to compare them with Robin Hood seems farfetched. Another chivalrous desperado appears in *Nellie Lacey and the Bushranger*, a one-act play first performed in the B.D.L. Festival of Community Drama in Sydney in 1943.

All these plays, which reflect the history, the climate and the rigours of Australian life have vigour and realism. They are full of interest and dramatic content. The modern sophisticated plays are less interesting. They are not quite smooth enough and their slanginess tends to become tedious. *Wives have their Uses* has these defects, and so has *Morning Sacrifice*. The only thriller in the batch, *Lady in Danger*, is quite horrifying. There are two murders, a cat with poisoned

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claws being used as the lethal instrument. And there is also a reporter who, alas! persistently calls his friend "laddibucks."

Crete, at the time of the German parachute invasion, is the setting of *Sons of the Morning*, a stirring "verse play." *Fire on the Snow* and *The Golden Lover*, also in verse, were both written for radio. The theme of the first is the Scott Expedition to the South Pole; the journey back and the desperate situation of the little group, as one by one they perish of the cold, is movingly told. *The Golden Boy* is a free interpretation of a charming Maori fairy story.

DORIS HUTTON

## DR. GRANVILLE-BARKER

IN the memorial tributes to Dr. Harley Granville-Barker in *The Times* and elsewhere, little reference has been made to the more academic side of his very varied activities, in part of which I came into somewhat close relation with him. Besides being a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, he was for a number of years one of its Professors. He contributed to its *Transactions* in 1927 an article on "Some Tasks for Dramatic Scholarship" and in 1929 on "Translating Plays."

His chief service, however, was to originate in 1929 the volumes of co-ordinated lectures and essays of which the first, "The Eighteen-Seventies," was edited by him. That was followed by "The Eighteen-Eighties," edited by Mr. Walter de la Mare, and "The Eighteen-Sixties" by John Drinkwater, two of his fellow Professors. Each of these volumes was planned under the direction of Dr. Granville-Barker at a series of small luncheon parties at the Garrick Club, when he acted host with a geniality and charm which those who were present can never forget.

During the same period he was re-writing and adding to his famous "Prefaces" to Shakespeare's plays, and in 1930 he delivered the Clark Lectures at Trinity College, Cambridge, on "Dramatic Method." In 1938, as President of the English Association, he delivered his Address on "Quality," in which he discussed the effect upon literature of the Industrial Revolution, and a year before the renewed outbreak of war foresaw the possibility of "liquidation by catastrophe" of the social structure created by that revolution.

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# AMATEUR SURVEY

## NEW-COMERS

NO less than six reports come from societies who are less than eighteen months old. The *Citizens' Theatre, Burnage, Manchester*, was formed only about three months ago, but within that time "Cousin Muriel" has been put on at the Levenshulme Town Hall and rehearsals have been begun for "Arms and the Man." An ambitious prospective programme includes the names of Ibsen, Shakespeare, Krog, O'Casey, Capek and Sierra. There should be room in Manchester for both the Unnamed Society and for the Citizens' Theatre, Burnage. Another play by Shaw, "Pygmalion," was chosen by the *Bancroft Players, Hitchin*, to present during their first year. This ran for four nights and "The Importance of being Earnest" for five nights. For the current season "This Happy Breed" is being produced, to be followed by two other plays. Profits on the first season are being invested as a nucleus for their Theatre Development Fund. A third Shaw play, this time, "Candida," was chosen by the *Broadedge Players, Broadfield and Edgware*, for their first full length production. Although founded early in 1945, they had won 4th and 6th places at the Watling Drama Festival in December of that year, and last June, at the Hendon Drama Federation Festival, they carried off first, second and third places with "The Dear Departed," "Far Above Rubies," and Act 3 of "Candida," respectively. Their first play this season was "Mr. Pim Passes By," which they have entered for the British Drama League Full-length Play Festival. They are now planning an evening of three one-acters and two entries for the Watling Festival. The *Southall Community Theatre, Middlesex*, was formed in April this year and is lucky in having a good theatre for its performances of "Villa for Sale" and "Sunday costs Five Pesos," which, with a musical programme, made up one presentation, and "The Man with a Load of Mischief," which was the first long play produced. S. J. Osborne writes: "We shall always be glad to welcome any of your readers who may be in our part of the world at our weekly gatherings, Monday nights at 8 p.m."

*London University Drama Society*, established last year, alternates modern with classical drama: "Ah, Wilderness!" will be followed this December by Goldoni's "The Fan." *Camden Training College* held its first Drama Festival this summer, which comprised

a dozen items, including excerpts from "Macbeth" and "Hamlet," played in modern costume, and from "King Lear" and "Toad of Toad Hall." A special feature was the souvenir programme, which contained literary commentaries contributed by the students.

## THE QUESTORS AND "THE UNNAMED"

The activities of The *Questors* during their 17th season have been many. Last May they were instrumental in forming the Little Theatre Guild of Great Britain, of which they are Secretaries, and they have also assisted with the Ealing Youth Drama Festival and in establishing new groups at Greenford and Perivale. Their more personal activities have included the formation of the Student Group of one dozen members who follow a regular course for one year, and the production of six full length plays, acted at 46 performances before some 7,500 persons. These presentations, which were exempt from Entertainment Tax, were supplemented with discussions led by professional critics and by talks on theatrical subjects. The six plays were "Heartbreak House," "Invitation to a Voyage," "Thunder Rock," "Ghosts," "The Arbitration," by Gilbert Murray from Menander, and an entirely new play by Erik Hutchinson entitled "But Now I am Returned."

An event of some importance is the opening by William Armstrong of the new theatre for the *Unnamed Society, Manchester*. When their theatre in Salford was bombed in 1940 nothing was left, says F. Sladen-Smith, "but the scarred and twisted name-plate, which, when it was picked up two days later, was still hot from the conflagration. The Society carried on without a break: during a period when no one knew if they would be alive the next morning, it seemed natural to carry on amidst every conceivable difficulty. . . . But one day the Director of the *Unnamed Society* was passing in a bus the august façade of the Whitworth Art Gallery, and was struck with the fantastic idea that here was an ideal place for a Little Theatre. . . . The Director of the Gallery welcomed the idea, her Council followed suit—and what had seemed a rather ambitious dream became a possibility. . . . A theatre has had to be constructed within a large gallery at a time when difficulties of every kind abound. But courage and determination have had their reward; a theatre has arisen,

designed and erected by the members, and although it will be a considerable time before the work is really finished, the opening is in November, and the first production, "Troilus and Cressida," follows almost immediately. Perhaps it should be added that on the plain cream walls of this new theatre there will be only one ornament—a scarred and twisted name-plate of many memories."

#### NOT ONLY PLAYS

Many reports this Quarter contain news of societies' activities outside the primary one of reading and producing plays. The first News Sheet issued by the *Langdon Players (Essex)* announces monthly rambles and monthly theatre parties, dances, and the inauguration of a circulating library. This group is producing "Acacia Avenue," "Baa Baa Blacksheep," "Rebecca" and "Berkeley Square," as well as a triple bill of one act plays, for which suitable pieces are still wanted, published or unpublished. The *Erith Theatre Guild*, Kent, runs a Guild orchestra; its *Naïvo Dramatic Society* last September produced "How are they at Home." The *North London Theatre Guild* held an Amateur Brains Trust in October and also ran a week-end school at Hoddesdon. This Guild has formed a panel of critics who visit productions by constituent societies. The *Reading Repertory Company* have inaugurated a Theatre Trip scheme, the first party of more than 120 visiting Oxford to see Sybil Thorndyke in "Call home the heart." Last season they presented "Ghosts," "They Came to a City," "Toad of Toad Hall," "Whiteoaks," and "She Passed through Lorraine," all at only 1s. 8d. a seat to subscribers. Their Christmas play will be their own version of "Alice."

Three of the societies run film shows. The *People's Theatre*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, has a Foreign Film Club, a Drama School, and an Annual Ball. The two most recent productions here were "Winterset," and "The Mask and the Face." The *Highbury Players*, Sutton Coldfield, also have a Film Group, a Student Group, an Apollo Club for poetry and music, and a lecture course by Prof. Allardyce Nicoll. In September the *Players* performed "Twilight Bar," and were visited by the author, Arthur Koestler, who told them that until then he had not believed his play *could* be produced! Their next play will be James Shirley's "The Lady of Pleasure (1635)." *Merseyside Unity Theatre* offers a full programme of film shows, gramophone recitals, lectures, discussions

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and a W.E.A. class, and yet finds time to present a new play. This is "Man with a Plan," which uses the "living newspaper" technique in a discussion of Liverpool's current problems. Unity has entered this play for the British Dram League Full-length Play Festival, Toller's "Requiem," for the Community Theatre Festival, and "I Can't Sleep," for the Irby Music and Drama Festival. Future plans include presentations of Strindberg's "The Stronger," a Wakefield Miracle play, a short Chehov, and, probably, Kataev's "Squaring the Circle."

### THREE FROM BIRMINGHAM

The *Curtain Players* are planning for a permanent Headquarters in southern Birmingham and wish to bring up the numbers of the acting company to 25. Their Autumn play is "The Taming of the Shrew," which they will tour round the suburbs for three months; after that, they intend to produce a modern three-act play. The *Bournville Dramatic Society*, whose audience is drawn from a wider area than its membership, is presenting four plays in its thirty-fifth season: "Quiet Week-end," "Victoria Regina," "Jupiter laughs," and "Noah." The *Dunlop Dramatic Society's* public programme for 1945-46 was "The Man who Came to Dinner," "The Moon looks Down," and "Dear Octopus." For its members there were a Drama Festival, lectures and demonstrations, and experimental evenings. During its thirteen years this society has produced several original plays.

### HERE AND THERE

Four open air performances of "A Midsummer night's dream" were given near Lingfield, Surrey, by a cast of local enthusiasts aged 7 to 79. Kathleen Cook, in the grounds of whose house at *Blindley Heath* the play was performed, writes: "This is the culminating point of five years of endeavour. We began in 1941 with 'Nine till six,' which we repeated in 1945. In the five years we have performed five plays, two pantomimes and five variety concerts." The *Selsdon Players*, Surrey, presented the first amateur production of "Happy New Year," which both authors attended. These Players, like the Questors, obtained exemption from Entertainments Tax. The *Masque Players*, Liverpool, who were formerly known as the Unity Players (not to be confused with Merseyside Unity

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Theatre) are presenting "Men in White," which has not previously been seen in Liverpool. The *Plymouth Anglo-Soviet Council Drama Company* has been touring its production of "Ride a-cock-Horse." The *Children's Theatre Guild*, Sutton, Wallington and Carshalton, is presenting to an audience of children a triple bill: "Joan the Maid," "The Queen and Mr. Shakespeare," and Scene 3 of "Abraham Lincoln."

#### FESTIVALS

The *Monmouthshire Drama League* now has ninety-two affiliated societies, an increase of twenty-six in the year. Junior and Senior Festivals were held during the past season, lectures were given and there were about 200 performances of three-act plays. The *Cleeborough Drama Festival* will be held in December, from the 9th to the 14th, at the Empire Theatre.

ALWYN ANDREW

#### TONBRIDGE AND HERTFORD

The Mitre Theatre Club and the Tonbridge Amateur Dramatic Society, after suspending activities during the war, amalgamated in January, 1946, to form the Tonbridge Theatre Club. The season's programme in the Club's own theatre includes discussions, lectures, play-readings, concerts, ballet, a pantomime and one-act and full length plays. In addition, two very successful public performances of "Tobias and the Angel" were given in June. On October 9th and 10th "Pride and Prejudice" was also produced in public. In these productions, the new Club, whose membership already exceeds 200, has set itself and hopes to maintain a high level of production, acting and decor.

The Hertford Dramatic and Operatic Society have again formulated an ambitious programme for the winter months, playing "Quiet Week," by Esther McCracken, for five performances one of which will be adjudicated in the B.D.L. Competition. In January the pantomime, "Cinderella," will be performed for eight performances, under the production of Alison MacLaren. The tenth Annual One-Act Play Festival will be held on the 14th April for one week, and the Society are entering a representative team for this and the B.D.L. One-Act Competition. The Society enjoys large public support and have contributed well over £1000 to charity, the objective however, is their own "Little Theatre."

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## IN ULSTER NOW

THE outstanding feature of the progress of the amateur movement in Northern Ireland during the last year has been the way in which dramatic societies have sprung up in the rural areas. This is a comparatively new thing. Only a few years ago the village concert was the main item in the calendar of the district. Now the Young Farmers' Clubs are taking the lead in providing plays, mainly by George Shiels, the favourite being *Professor Tim*, and there is a general desire to follow up the initial success with a more ambitious programme. Unfortunately, the number of plays with an Ulster locale and in Ulster dialect is comparatively small, and a great future exists for a playwright who can cater for this enthusiastic new audience. The adaptation of established English or Scottish rural comedies is not easy. Every district has a way of speaking and a code of behaviour which is peculiarly its own, and in the case of such a comparatively isolated community as Ulster the springs of behaviour and the feeling for humour are all slightly different—and in this "slightly" lies all the barrier between one race and another.

It is a little early to say how this rural movement will develop. It may languish and eventually die for lack of proper condition for growth. The soil at any rate is good. There is among Irish people a genuine feeling for drama. The acting ability, particularly among the men, is high. There is also a strong critical sense which condemns in no uncertain voice, vague characterisation and incorrect presentation. But the handicaps are great. There is first of all, the lack of adequate stages. This is admittedly a difficulty which is not confined to Northern Ireland, but it is doubtful whether the position in England and Scotland is as desperate in this respect as it is over the whole of Ulster. Secondly, there is the lack of adequate instruction in production. It is hoped to meet this demand in some degree by the appointment of an Advisor of Amateur Drama by the Ministry of Education and the Carnegie Trustees. The appointment is being made as these lines are written, and the general direction will be in the hands of the Northern Ireland C.E.M.A. Incidentally, the name of C.E.M.A. still remains as the initials; it is felt is associated with a quality of entertainment which has long been absent in the province. The new Advisor will have his hands full for the next few years.

A movement has been afoot during the last

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two years for the co-ordination of amateur work by the establishment of the Association of Ulster Amateur Dramatic Societies. It arose out of a meeting called by Mr. Alan McClelland in 1943 for the setting up of an Arts Theatre for Belfast. The Theatre is alas, still a dream but a great deal has been done towards unifying the control of Societies and the improvement of the standards of acting and production. Another group, the Guild Theatre Movement, is also progressing towards getting little theatres in the larger areas and an interesting development has been the beginning of a Guild Theatre in Londonderry. Both the A.U.A.D.S. and the G.T.M. have had week-end schools and conferences to discuss our individual difficulties. The Associations were fortunate in having Mr. John Bourne as their principal lecturer in February of this year, and a great increase of strength was the result.

A second school was held in September with Miss Hilda Burgess as the head of a team which included Mr. Sydney Hewitt in charge of Production, Mr. Inglis on Make-up, Miss Weir on Voice Production and Mr. Henderson on Lighting. It is still too early to talk of a residential school for a fortnight, but this idea of a school is gradually being accepted as necessary even for those who believe that the best results are obtained by acting by the light of nature, or that rules of productions are either (a) not possible, or (b) only made to be broken.

That the need for instruction is urgently necessary was proved by some of the performances at the Drama Festival held by the Group Theatre. It lasted three weeks and whereas the level of the performance by the St. Malachy's players in *You Never Can Tell*, the Fisherwick D.S. in *Jupiter Laughs* was high, the standard of some of the others was deplorably low. It was not a matter of the difference between the country and the town as the Aughnacloy players in *Gastlight* showed what could be done by good production and intelligent players.

The adjudicator, Mr. John Bourne gave the coveted cup to St. Matthews D.S. in the perennial *New Gossoon*, and the best individual awards to Mr. R. T. Rice for his playing of Rabbit Hamill and to Miss Marie Bennett as Dr. Mary Murray. Mention must also be made of a delightful performance by the Joymount Players of *Miss Clegg's Legacy*.

Generally speaking, the year has been full of promise for the future of Amateur Drama in Northern Ireland.

A. S. G. Loxton



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We hope that the students who take this course may help to supply the ever increasing demand for more and better producers and for appropriately qualified drama instructors and adjudicators.

Among those who have promised to give lectures during the Course are: Mr. Martin-Browne, Mr. John Burrell, Mr. Henry Cass, Mr. Eric Crozier and Mr. Norman Marshall.

Numbers are being limited to thirty students and although these have already been chosen, it is possible that there may still be a few vacancies, because some of those who have entered their names may not be able to attend at the last moment. Some previous experience in dramatic work is a necessary qualification.

FRANCES MACKENZIE

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All communications with regard to Advertisements should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, Mr. E. E. Preston, 69 Fleet Street, London, E.C.4.

In response to many requests *Amateur Notes* will in future appear, as in the present number, in the form of a running commentary under the title of "Amateur Survey." Information from affiliated societies will be more welcome than ever for incorporation in the Survey, and should be addressed as before, to the Editor of DRAMA.

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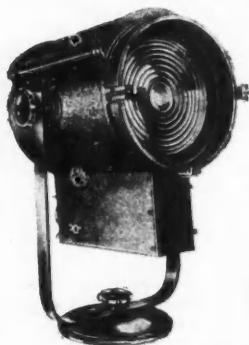
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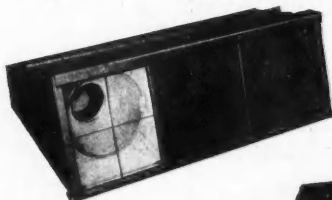
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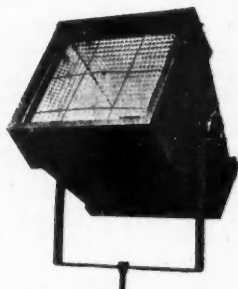
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